



NEHALEM BAY
HEALTH CENTER & PHARMACY
COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY CARE

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Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 27.

I am Gail Nelson, CEO of Nehalem Bay Health Center and Pharmacy in Wheeler, Oregon. We are a Federally Qualified Health Center serving Tillamook and southern Clatsop Counties. As the only safety-net primary care provider in northern Tillamook County, we play a critical role in ensuring access to care in an isolated region.

Like many rural health centers, we face severe workforce shortages. Tillamook County is designated as both a Medically Underserved Area and a Health Professional Shortage Area, meaning we have far fewer healthcare providers than other parts of Oregon or the U.S.

Recruiting and retaining providers is a constant challenge. It often takes us over a year to fill critical positions like doctors and behavioral health providers. The limited candidate pool forces us to stretch our resources and puts stress on our existing staff. This leads to staff burnout and longer wait times for patients.

The 2022 Tillamook County Community Health Needs Assessment identified major barriers to workforce retention:

- Limited childcare and public transportation make it difficult for people to enter or stay in the workforce.
- High housing costs price out potential workers.
- Many students who train for healthcare careers leave the region due to limited job opportunities.

These issues aren't unique to us—many rural and underserved communities in Oregon face the same challenges. Without action, these shortages will only worsen, further limiting healthcare access for vulnerable populations.

These challenges are exactly why we need Senate Bill 27. A direct investment in workforce development will allow us to invest in recruitment, retention, and training to ensure that high quality healthcare services remain available in rural areas.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 27 to ensure clinics like ours can continue serving rural communities. This investment isn't just about jobs—it's about ensuring access to care for those who need it most.

Thank you.